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Syria: The extremist regime in Damascus is calling for another round of fighting against "imperialist-Zionist aggression" and will have no part of a political settlement.

An official statement in Damascus on 19 November categorically rejected the Middle East resolutions before the UN Security Council. The Syrians are trying to gain support for their radical stance from other "progressive" Arab states such as Algeria, Egypt and Iraq, but there is little enthusiasm for the Syrian effort to foment a new military confrontation. A recent high-level Syrian visit to Iraq, for example, resulted only in a new economic agreement between the two countries.

The Syrians have continued to support the infiltration of saboteurs into Israeli-occupied territory despite threats of retaliation from Tel Aviv. In early November Damascus announced the formation of a "Popular Liberation Army" which will be attached directly to the Ministry of Defense. Government media have intensified their calls for a war of popular liberation.

Syria's support of the terrorists is a source of constant irritation to Israel, and Syria remains highly vulnerable to Israeli reprisals. These might include air attacks on Damascus itself. Despite the regime's vulnerability and failure to elicit support from the other Arabs, it seems fixed on rigid resistance to any moves towards a settlement with Tel Aviv.

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*Egypt: Nasir's hard-line speech before the opening session of Egypt's National Assembly will make the achievement of a viable Middle East peace settlement more difficult.

Nasir declared that his country could "never allow Israel, whatever the cost, to pass through the Suez Canal." This departs from Egypt's previously indicated position that Israel would be allowed eventual use of the canal if the Palestine refugee question was solved equitably. Nasir's hard line may be explained in part by a new-found confidence in Egypt's military. It may also be in part a bow to popular anti-Israel sentiment, which would interpret Israel's use of the canal as selling out to the "enemy."

Nasir also declared that the Arabs can accept nothing short of Israeli evacuation from "every inch" of occupied territory. Although these statements appear to indicate that Nasir has adopted a harder position, he did not completely reject the possibility of a political settlement with Israel.

Nasir criticized the recently passed UN Security Council resolution on the Middle East, to which he appeared to have previously acquiesced, as being "insufficient." He also stated, however, that Cairo is studying the resolution, and that while Egypt must prepare its military forces for use in case all else fails, "a sufficient degree of strength may be a substitute for using it in fact." If Nasir continues to adhere to this tougher line, the continuing stalemate will probably result in increased tensions in the area.

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NOTES

USSR-Malaysia: The USSR and Malaysia have announced the establishment of diplomatic relations for which they have been negotiating since April. The Soviets have for some time been quietly courting Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines--nations where they have not traditionally been active. Moscow has made little headway with Manila, but has a trade mission in Singapore which may in due course follow the Malaysian example.

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